



## Parents of Seeach Sod Students Make Emotional Trip to Ukraine

When dozens of parents of children with disabilities depart on an emotional journey to the grave sites of giants of previous generations buried in Ukraine, the feeling of togetherness, shared destinies and deep unity generate a tremendous force that no one can resist • Parents who participated in the trip organized by Seeach Sod a few weeks ago note that the experience revitalized them, and that they will not forget it for the rest of their lives • All about their special preparations for Shavuot, the yahrtzeit of the Baal Shem Tov, right near his tziyun in Mezhibuzh.



The choir



At the Jewish cemetery in Berditchev



Rabbi Shimon Levy, CEO of Seeach Sod

“**S**habbos descended on the little town and one after another, like angels in white, we women lit the candles. While I was lighting, my thoughts wandered to my Noach, who I had left at home. In the background I heard the singing of the choir: “*Vzakeini lgadel banim ubnei banim ... Acheinu kol Beis Yisrael...*” And everyone wept, praying from the depths of their hearts, not wanting to leave the candles.”

This is how one of the mothers who participated in this remarkable trip, organized by Seeach Sod for parents of students in Yerushalayim, Bnei Brak and Beit Shemesh, described it in her diary. It was a trip back to our roots; it was personal, piercing and cleansing, as they followed the footsteps of the giants who paved the path for us and helped us understand the significance of our existence in this world in the best way possible. To this day, these giants imbue us with the emotional fortitude to overcome the challenges that life presents us.

The long, often introspective, and sometimes bumpy — due to the poorly constructed roads in this region of Ukraine — trip was reminiscent of a greater trip, the personal and individual journey of each participant. Every member of the trip is a parent of a child in Seeach Sod, and they have trekked on a long road together with their Divinely granted gift, a treasure that has put them on a path of challenge.

This is the second time that Rabbi Shimon Levy, executive director of Seeach Sod, together with his dedicated staff, have organized this trip to *kiurei tzaddikim* in Ukraine, for parents of his students. The parents, whose children receive dedicated care and support all year round from Seeach Sod, can draw strength

from other parents on the trip, and can recharge and create energy for the entire year. Parents who participated in the trip testify that they returned from it different than when they left. They felt elevated, purified, and stronger and more able to deal with their challenges.

### Uman: ‘You Can Feel the Connection’

Rabbi Levy considers this special trip an important project that has far-reaching therapeutic significance. He did not spare any effort to make the trip most pleasant for the parents, beginning with the ride to the airport, a personal care package for each participant, musical accompaniment throughout the trip, and the quality content on each leg of the journey. Of course, the hospitality and accommodations were on the highest standards.

Rabbi Yisrael Goldwasser accompanied the participants on the trip and enhanced it throughout with thought-provoking content, *chizuk* and relevant historical background in each place. The Yachad choir moved people to tears with their emotional singing, as did renowned *klezmer* musician, Reb Chilik Frank.

The first stop upon landing in Ukraine was the holy *tziyun* of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, *zy”a*, in Uman. The choir began with moving songs to open their hearts.

The sensation was that of cleansing of the soul; the parents simply did not want to leave. “I was never in Uman,” one father related, “but for the first time I felt something that I cannot define. I felt enveloped. It literally melted me. It was also the power of the *tzibbur*; we are parents with shared destinies, who came together to the *tzaddik*. I felt that this connection has a tremendous power.”

### Shabbos at the Baal Shem Tov: ‘Kol Yisrael Chaveirim’

Late on Thursday night, the parents arrived in Mezhibuzh, to the magnificent Holiness Hotel, to spend Shabbos at the *tziyun* of the holy Baal Shem Tov. Friday was packed with experiences and spiritual preparations for Shabbos.

As the sun set, the parents gathered in the square for an prelude to Shabbos. “The weather was pleasant and cool; we all gathered wearing festive Shabbos attire,” one mother described in her journal. “There were *shtreimels* from Vizhnitz, Belz and Breslov, alongside *spodik*s from Ger and Amshinov. There were *kneitsch* hats, and *kapotes* of all kinds, including those with gold and white stripes and a white *gartel*. There were suits and ties — everyone was represented, and the scene moved me deeply. Seeach Sod’s motto came to life here: ‘*Kol Yisrael chaveirim*.’”

Rabbi Goldwasser prepared the group for Shabbos with words of *chizuk* and *midrashim*, and then Rabbi Levy spoke. He explained that the common denominator of all the parents there is their *mesirus nefesh* for the *chinuch* and advancement of their child. In line with the Baal Shem Tov’s teachings, they do not focus on how far the child will go. Rather, they focus on investing effort for the sake of investing effort and nurturing the child, and they realize that each child has a connection to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Rabbi Levy expressed his admiration for the parents who participated and to the staff that worked so hard to organize the trip and ensure its success.

Candle lighting took place against the backdrop of slow, moving songs, which rose and opened the Gates of Heavens along with the dancing flames. Each mother stood, covering her

face, and didn’t even try to contain the tears.

### At the Ancient Shul: ‘Lechah Dodi Likras Kallah’

After candle lighting, the parents went to *daven* at the restored shul of the Baal Shem Tov on the outskirts of the village. They walked in their Shabbos finery past rickety homes and along stone pathways, basking in the cool breeze and the soft setting sun of Mezhibuzh. “The whole way to the shul I felt like I was floating among the lights,” one mother describes in her journal. “The light of the sun and the inner light that shone from the faces of all the people I met, including my own inner light. I inhaled the clear air deep into my lungs, and tried to hold on to these ethereal moments and contain them inside me so they shouldn’t slip away.”

The Shabbos meals were gourmet, and some of the parents spoke during the meals. The togetherness of the Seeach Sod family intensified to new heights that no one fathomed they could reach. During the meal, they sang, accompanied by the Yachad choir. The next day, they *davened Shacharis* at the beautifully restored shul of the Ohev Yisrael of Apta.

On Motzoei Shabbos, everyone gathered to *daven* at the *tziyun* of the Baal Shem Tov, and then the choir sang slow, poignant songs, among them the *Tefillas HaShelah*, *Vyihiyu Rachamecha Misgolelim al Am Kodshechah* and *Niggun Teshuvah*. The singing was accompanied by Reb Chilik Frank on the clarinet.

### At the Defender of Klal Yisrael: ‘Children, Health and Parnassah’

On Sunday, after a lofty Shabbos, the parents traveled

to Harav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, known as the Defender of *Klal Yisrael*. The parents crowded into the small *ohel* in the middle of the Jewish cemetery in Berditchev to *daven* and sing from the bottom of their hearts. On the wall of the *ohel* are the words of the famed song composed by Rav Levi Yitzchak, “*Ribbono Shel Olam, lomir machen a beit...*”

The words of this song, written in Yiddish, touched the parents to the deepest chords of their souls, and they stood there, singing in unison until the final line: “*Ober ich, Levi Yitzchak, ben Sara Sosha zugt: Yisgadal v’yiskadash Shemei Rabba!*”

The singing didn’t stop there, and more songs began to flow as they stood in the small *tziyun* — *Vzakeini lgadel banim ubnei banim* and more — tears pouring down their faces; no one even tried to stop them.

The mood by the end of the trip, which concluded with a festive banquet while sailing down the river, was one of elation. The tremendous spiritual and physical contribution that this trip had made to each parent was evident. “Yidden have the power to strengthen one another,” says D., one of the fathers who was very touched. “Dealing with our challenge is not only technical; it is also emotional. This trip has given us the emotional strength to deal with the challenges *Hashgachah* has sent us, in the best way possible. It turns out we don’t only need professional assistance. We are Yidden and we also need spiritual reserves. There is no doubt that together with the challenge, we were also given the ability to draw *koach* from *tzaddikim*. This is a trip I will not forget for the rest of my life.”